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The Musket

LEXINGTON HIGH SCHOOL'S STUDENT-RUN NEWSPAPER SINCE 1969

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Volume LXIV Issue II—January 2022

Honoring Coach Lisa George-Cox

■ Janya Utkarsh
Margot Bordman
Staff Writers

On Nov. 22, the Lexington community unveiled a memorial dedicated to the late Lisa George-Cox, a Special Education educator and track coach for Lexington Public Schools.

Born and raised in Roxbury, MA, Cox graduated from Lexington High School in 1981. At LHS, she was a three-time Boston Globe Scholastic Track Athlete and an inductee to the LHS Athletic Hall of Fame.

During her coaching career at LHS, Cox led the girls and boys indoor and outdoor track teams to numerous championships, including the Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association Division I Championships and Middlesex League Meet Championships. In addition, she coached eight athletes to achieve All-American honors.

"She took all of her knowledge from her growing up being a sprinter: how to make the kids better, how to train kids better, and she brought that knowledge and passion to practice everyday… Her legacy is that she made this program as good as it possibly could be, and the kids loved her for it," Emmett O'Brien, a track coach who worked closely with Cox, said.

Jayden Bai, a junior at LHS and athlete who trained under Cox, credited LHS' track teams successes to her constant encouragement, motivation, and dedication.

"Coach was the backbone of the sprints program, but also the team spirit. She was always happy and always clapping and cheering us on, so that was really a great aspect of her aura and spirit around LHS," Bai said.

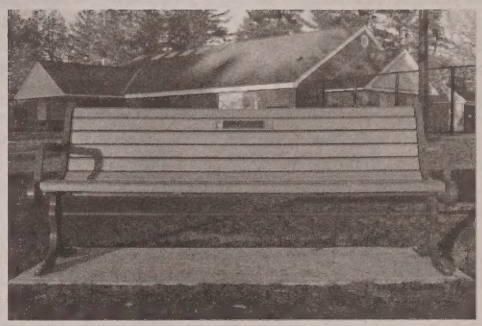
Athletes also admired Cox's efforts to create an inclusive environment among the members of the track team.

"Coach Cox cared a lot about everyone on the team. She cared about them. She helped them out, and she was always there for everyone," Michael Gerfen, a junior sprinter on the LHS track team, said.

In addition to boosting team morale, Cox helped many athletes discover their passion for track.

"She was the reason I fell in love with track so much, and the reason I think it's such an awesome sport," Joshua Lee, a senior who trained under Cox, said.

On top of growing up, coaching in the town, and putting her kids in the Lexington Public School systems, she was also a special education tutor at Clarke and Diamond Middle School.



Staff photo by Olivia Hoover
Coach Cox memorial bench

"She was very involved in the Lexington community, she was a very big piece of it. She loved everything she did. She was as passionate about special education as she was for track field," O'Brien said.

Throughout her life, Cox inspired others by spreading positivity and encouragement.

"She's a name that everybody would recognize in the school, and I don't think there's ever been a negative connotation attached to her name. She was always very uplifting and encouraging," Bai said.

Cox's memorial bench now sits in the exact place where she would always cheer on the LHS track races, supporting her student athletes. Her passion for track, kindness toward students, and unwavering support for her athletes will continue to inspire the Lexington community.

Lexington Public Schools Add Monthly Early Release Days

■ Shreya Kesarwani
Staff Writer

Starting in November, Lexington Public Schools implemented monthly early release days for middle and high school students to ease the transition to in-person learning.

Dr. Julie Hackett, the Superintendent of LPS, created the proposal in October after receiving feedback from faculty members in Lexington and considering national concerns about the quality of education during the pandemic. The administration aims to use these half days to reduce the pressure teachers and students have faced in the past few months when adjusting to the full return to school in a pandemic environment.

"The teaching and learning process is far more challenging and time-consuming during a pandemic. Typically well-adjusted students may be struggling, as they transition back to an education that resembles pre-COVID times … Educators are pressed for time to consult with colleagues and meet the complex needs of their students," Hackett said.

After discussions, the School Committee approved the proposal with a 5-0 vote, Hackett's message resonating with the other members of the committee.

"I was a high school teacher, so I remember what that pressure is like. You're in school with your students teaching all day. Then, you have papers to grade, have lessons to plan, and need to talk to parents. When does all that happen? Anything we can do to make it easier for them ultimately benefits the students," Kathleen Lenihan, Chair of the School Committee, said.

The effects of the pandemic exacerbated the pressures already placed upon teachers.

"We really have this expectation that things are going to be normal this year, but life is still not normal. It still requires a lot of flexibility on the part of your teachers to figure out how we are still doing this. All of that requires preparation. It takes time," Lenihan said.

The early release days aim to reduce the burden on teachers. However, many question whether these early release days provide sufficient time for instructors to prepare adequate lesson plans.

"This is about giving the teachers a little bit of time. It is not enough. It's never enough, but it is something. And something is better than nothing," Lenihan said.

Based on reactions from the faculty, the new policy seems to be effective for teachers. In addition, it has received a positive response from the student body.

"Everyone needs an opportunity to relax at the end of the week, and I think it is a good addition that they made this year. I personally have activities after school, so having those early release days allows me to relax before those," Sitara Mitragotri, a sophomore, said.

The long-term effectiveness of the calendar change can only be seen with time, but many remain optimistic.

"This is really about giving teachers the time they need to do their job. That is, giving teachers a tool to help them be better prepared to be better teachers, which ultimately helps the students," Lenihan said.

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The New Lunch System: A Necessary Safety Precaution

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Staff Writers

The transition to in-person learning has been difficult—many changes have been made to student schedules to ensure the safety of students and faculty at Lexington High School, including a brand new lunch system. In past years, three lunches were spread across two blocks, but this year, four lunches have been arranged into one long block.

According to Associate Principal Andrew Baker, the change was prompted by a blueprint from district-level leaders that instructed schools to make appropriate adjustments to fit social distancing guidelines.

The new lunch system opens up additional spaces for students to eat in and reduces the number of people eating during each lunch period. Given the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic, the new system creates a safer school environment.

Pre-pandemic lunches would be considered unsafe with COVID-19—an airborne virus. Creating a fourth lunch gave students the space they needed to sit farther apart from each other to properly social distance. Baker explained that this extra space would not have been available with just three lunch blocks.

Medha Morparia, a junior at LHS, said that pre-pandemic lunches in Commons I were often congested and difficult to navigate.

"Sometimes we couldn't even find the chair and it was hard to walk because of how crowded it was. That would probably be the case if they ever brought us back to three lunches," Morparia said.

The need for additional space encouraged LHS to utilize additional spaces like the gym, where students can eat with enough space to socially distance.

However, the recent cold weather has prompted more students to eat inside, and some students have observed that the indoor space is starting to feel cramped and unsafe. It also appears that students may not practice social distancing, even when given the opportunity.

"Everyone's super close together and it's just a closed space with people eating, which is not safe at all," Morparia said. "The gym is not enough space and the Commons are also pretty gross. Even though they move the desks to give us space, everyone just moves the desks anyway so that they can actually see people and be social."

Although this arrangement raises concerns about the effectiveness of the current measures, it is unreasonable to expect the school to manage each individual's actions during lunch.

"I'm not going around with a measuring tape and putting it between students, but the idea is, if we opened up more spaces around the school, students would probably go to more spaces and spread out more, which is better for the pandemic," Baker said.

It is apparent that the school has recognized the flaws in the system and is currently working on ways to balance out the schedule.

"As long as we can meet the safety thresholds that we want for students, we'll tweak the schedule however we can to make it more bearable for students and teachers," Baker said

Considering the restrictions the school faces due to the public health crisis and overcapacity concerns, the four-lunch system mitigates the spread of COVID-19 better than previous solutions. There are still ongoing discussions about the lunch system and the schedule in general within the school. Teachers and students have expressed their opinions to the administration, and all voices are being considered in the decision-making process moving forward.

"We have a pretty good amount of protection right now, but if the pandemic has taught us anything, it's that you just, unfortunately, can't take anything for granted, and you have to be ready to pivot if you need to pivot," Baker said.

As the pandemic evolves, LHS adminstration has discussed revising the schedule to reflect the situation and ensure student safety, which may affect the number and location of lunch blocks.

Supporting Lexington Small Businesses Amidst Closures

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Staff Writers

The recent flurry of business closures in Lexington Center has deeply affected the Lexington community. Both residents and business owners have been impacted by these closings, and during these tumultuous times, supporting local businesses is vital.

Recently, in the Center, both Starbucks and Panera Bread closed down. Before that, residents saw the crêpe shop—Tres Petite Creperie—close as well. These locations were especially popular among students.

"The center and all the businesses in the center are just a really big part of our community and all the high school students and middle school students all go to the center to convene and create this unity," Grace Ou, a junior at Lexington High School, said. "Seeing all of the businesses that have been here for years leave feels like we are losing a part of our community."

Both Starbucks and Panera closed after struggling to pay their rent.

"I think personally the rent is really high in Lexington. Also, with COVID it's really hard to find staffing," Aoife Brennan, an LHS student and an employee at Abbott's, a local custard business, said.

As the pandemic continues and financial limitations persist, other Lexington businesses may have difficulty staying open. These hardships seem likely to worsen as winter approaches, and more people are hesitant to dine indoors.

Now that Starbucks and Panera have closed, dining space in the town center is limited. More people frequent locations like Rancatore's, a well-known ice cream shop in the Center.

"We've gotten more customers because there's a lack of space and also food and places people can hang out in Lexington," Nora Mabuci, an employee at Rancatore's, said.

For businesses to remain open, creating a welcoming environment for their customers is key.

"We have our owner here a lot talking to people, building relationships with people in the town, and I think that's something that has affected our business and being able to stay in business versus the other chain businesses," Mabuci said.

Brennan also spoke about daily resource management, which allows businesses to save any excess products for necessary times later on, rather than letting them go to waste. It's a strategy that could be effective if implemented by other businesses.

"We use a lot of our products wisely like saving the ones we don't necessarily need to use. We run our custard fresh every day, and we don't run too much custard if we know it won't be bought much," Brennan said.

As a community, we can help keep businesses open. The solution is simple—support local businesses.

"People can find a Panera and a Starbucks everywhere, in so many towns, everywhere. But Rancatore's is so special to so many people and it provides a certain type of quality that you can't find at a chain business," Mabuci said.

The welcoming atmosphere at Rancatore's is part of what makes their business successful in the Lexington community.

"We're going back into the winter season, so keep up with supporting local businesses and making sure that you're doing takeout and visiting the center every so often to buy stuff," Ou said.

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LHS Student Starts Language Learning Initiative Over the Pandemic

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During the COVID-19 pandemic, Emily Wang, currently a sophomore at Lexington High School, founded World Wide English, an English language learning initiative. The program, pairing native English speakers with Chinese students, has expanded to serve students in over 20 cities in China.

As an immigrant from China, Wang wanted to create a community that Chinese students could belong to, something she had sought when she first moved to Lexington in sixth grade.

"We wanted to create a place where you could share whatever you want and learn at the same time," Wang said.

With the help of Lonamae Shand, the English Language Learning teacher at Diamond Middle School, Wang was able to create a space to foster cultural exchanges between the students living in the United States and China.

"Ms. Shand inspired me a lot and really helped me get settled in living here," Wang said.

Wang started the project by reaching out to family friends back in China, and from there, they spread the word to their own classmates.

Depending on their English proficiency, each student in the program is placed into one of three levels: beginning, intermediate, or advanced. They are then paired with a volunteer teacher. An average class typically meets weekly for half an hour, with each lesson tailored to the student's needs.

The program presents an opportunity for students to verbally practice their English in conversations, a skill not focused on in typical English classes for Chinese students.

"In China, they may get the experience of listening and writing since they are mainly focused on grammar, but they don't necessarily get the experience of speaking it for themselves," Jocelyn Huang, a teacher in the program, said.

Not only has the program benefited the students in China, but it has also benefited the student teachers in the United States.

"Even though I may be Chinese myself, I normally don't get to learn about Chinese culture, so I think teaching has given me a better understanding of what life in China is like," Huang said.

Teachers also have a chance to create a personal connection with their students amid a time of isolation.

"A lot of students like to tell me about their birthdays and personal details like that. I even know all their dogs and all their siblings," Huang said.

Wang discussed bringing World Wide English to Lexington for ELL students in the future while still maintaining the relationship she has created with the students back in China.

"I want to do the most we can as I feel that the program has brought me lots of joy for a long time now," Wang said.

LHS Spanish Teacher Ryan Casey Wins the ACTFL/IALLT Award

Staff photo by Michael Gordon
Spanish teacher Ryan Casey in his classroom

Zahra Karim
Alexis Chen
Staff Writers

In Nov. 2021, Ryan Casey, a Spanish teacher at Lexington High School, received the ACTFL/IALLT Award for Excellence in World Language Instruction Using Technology. Recognized for the integration of technology into his classes, Casey was selected from a national pool of K-12 world language teachers.

Casey has taught at LHS for seven years and has been an important mentor to many LHS students. Casey believes in creating a space for students to learn while having fun and respecting Hispanic cultures.

"I want kids to leave the classroom feeling that they have gained a new skill or new knowledge, that they had fun and laughed a lot, and that they feel that their presence or identities were important to the lesson," Casey said.

Ireh Hong, a junior and past student of Casey, emphasized that his method made learning Spanish more exciting.

"Mr. Casey was a fun, energetic, and vibrant teacher. It was fun to pay attention to his lessons and he made learning an enjoyable process. I appreciated the energy and comfortable environment in our classroom, which definitely helped me learn a lot better and improve my Spanish skills," Hong said.

Casey appreciates being able to help students learn the language and its culture.

"My favorite thing is the opportunity, every day, to share with students a language and a culture that has always really fascinated me, and to help them on their own journey on being fluent and culturally proficient and citizens of the world who really appreciate the food, the music, the history," Casey said.

Hong credits her Spanish skills, and significant improvement since middle school in the Spanish language, to Casey's guidance.

"As a freshman, I still lacked experience and practice with Spanish... and it was hard for me to participate as I transitioned from middle school. Mr. Casey helped me get more comfortable with using the Spanish language, and I was able to learn a lot in his class," Hong said.

Casey's passion for the Spanish language and culture is evident through his teaching approach and the positive experiences of many of his past students.

"I had a very enjoyable experience in Mr. Casey's class. Despite the halt from school during quarantine, I was able to learn a lot during his class and experience a whole new level of Spanish, which I'm really grateful for," Hong said.

New Boba Tea Shop CoCo Opens in Lexington Center

Disha Sankholkar
Staff Writer

During the school day, many students at Lexington High School use their free blocks to relax and buy refreshments at local businesses in Lexington Center. However, the recent closure of staples like Starbucks and Panera has prompted students to explore other options.

On Nov. 6, CoCo Fresh Tea & Juice, a new boba tea shop, opened up in the Center. CoCo is a chain of boba tea shops headquartered in Taiwan with multiple locations stationed along the East Coast of the United States. Their dedication to recreating the tea drinking experience has attracted significant interest from students.

"I was really excited because Starbucks just closed so I really wanted to have another place [my friends and I] could get drinks and hang out, and I love bubble tea," Mirra Payson, a junior at LHS, said.

Given the shop's proximity to LHS, CoCo has proven especially convenient for students coming out of a busy school day or looking to leave campus during a free block.

"My favorite part about having this new boba shop in town is that if you have a free, it's a cool place to go and relax and have a refreshing drink," Anna Zaniolo, a junior, said.

Many students are already familiar with the concept of boba tea, having tried it at stores in neighboring towns. Although, having a shop close by has allowed for experimentation with new flavors and toppings.

"Having this shop in Lexington Center has definitely incentivized me to have it more times and try new drinks and topping combos," Zaniolo said.

CoCo offers many boba tea flavors, including seasonal tea, milk tea, fruit tea, yakult, slush/smoothies, tea latte, fresh milk, cloud, and fresh tea, along with an assortment of toppings, such as fruit-flavored jelly, tapioca bubbles, red beans, pudding, and more seasonal toppings. Many of these drinks are served hot or cold depending on the customer's preference.

"There are just a lot of different options [at CoCo] and really good boba. Normally I just go with pearl milk tea, but since it's so close by and I visit it pretty often, I've been adventurous with the new boba shop and tried different toppings and different teas," Payson said.

Staff photo by Sujin Lee
New Boba Shop in town center: CoCo Fresh Tea & Juice

CoCo often has a long line of customers leading out onto Massachusetts Avenue. The store also has an app that makes ordering and receiving deals more convenient for its customers.

With its proximity to LHS and variety of bubble tea selections, CoCo has proved to be a welcome addition to the town Center.

Lexington Educational Foundation Hosts Annual Trivia Bee

Devangi Rathi
Tara Pai
Staff Writers

On Dec. 6, 2021, the Lexington Education Foundation hosted its annual trivia bee to fund grants for Lexington Public Schools. Many participants, from parents to LPS teachers, participated in the competitive event.

The Master of the Ceremonies was Jeff Leonard, who served as the Coordinator of Performing Arts at Lexington High School for over 35 years. The judges were Alessandro Alessandrini, Farzana Khatri, and David Lee, along with guest judge Wendy Manz.

Although the purpose of the LEF Trivia Bee is to finance the educational activities that LPS is unable to fund alone, it also engages the Lexington community, providing participants an opportunity to work with their community members in a different environment.

"I like the camaraderie of working with some of my colleagues in a different setting, but I just enjoy trivia, the competition of it," Mark Waldeck, a science teacher at Jonas Clarke Middle School, said.

In the trivia bee, there were fifteen teams that were further split up into three primary swarms, each with five teams competing against each other. The winning teams would proceed to the final swarm, along with two randomly chosen losing teams.

It's buzz-ness time emerged as the winning team of the swarm. The winner from the second swarm was the Bridge Queen Bees, and after a long tie-breaker, To Bee Determined prevailed in the third swarm.

In the final swarm the winners of the first three swarms competed along with the randomly selected teams Ain't Mis-Bee-Hivin' and The Revolutionaries. After the final swarm, To Bee Determined was crowned the winner of the 2021 LEF Trivia Bee.

Waldeck advises teams hoping to participate in the future to broaden their knowledge by composing teams with varied specializations.

"It's a diversity of knowledge. You have to have people who know a little bit of everything but, you know, specialize here and there so that [if] one person doesn't know it, they can lean on someone else," Waldeck said.

Sarah Jensen, a junior at LHS and member of the questions committee, also recommends following general trends in the media.

"Always stay up to date on your sports, that's a big thing, know the winners of general things, keep up with the top billboards for music. There will always be some kind of tech questions, some Silicon Valley Tech questions," Jensen said.

Waldeck plans to continue participating in the trivia bee.

"It's a lot of fun. It's a great way to support the educational foundation in Lexington and have a little bit of a competition to boot," Waldeck said.

Jensen agrees the trivia bee is a fun competitive way to bring the Lexington community together.

"I think education is a big central part of Lexington and a trivia bee is a way to express that and show that. I think it's nice to be able to get together with your friends and colleagues and show what you know in front of your family and friends," Jensen said.

LHS Admin Pauses Advisory to Revise Its Structure

Sophia Zhang
Sahana Behera
Staff Writers

In an email sent out to the Lexington High School community on Dec. 3, Principal Andrew Stephens announced that the LHS administration would be pausing Advisory to make adjustments to its structure.

Having identified issues with the format, Stephens expressed the need for a new structure that would allow Advisory to fulfill its purpose.

"The original intent was to have a different set of adults that kids could have a connection with over four years, as opposed to a year-to-year basis with individual teachers," Stephens said.

Stephens acknowledged that forming strong student-teacher relationships within short, sparse blocks is a difficult task. Feedback from students and staff supported this observation.

"I feel like they should've given us a Google Form like, 'Here are all the teachers you've had. Pick one who you could talk to [about] outside of school stuff, or [that you] feel comfortable around, and we could make that your Advisory teacher," Helena Reavely, a sophomore, said.

Many students and faculty echoed this sentiment. Hannah Weissman, a math teacher at LHS, expressed the importance of Advisory's purpose to foster community.

"I think if the goal is to build community, which I think is an admirable goal, then I think there has to be consistency. So I think the first thing I'd be interested in them exploring is meeting once a week—maybe on the day where we just have five classes or something," Weissman said.

This presents another conflict: scheduling. The LHS administration sought to provide ample time for Advisory while limiting cuts to the existing schedule—a task that proved difficult. The administration also had trouble allotting teachers enough time to plan the meetings.

"Because with all my other classes, I felt like we didn't have a lot of time to plan. So it was good, but it was stressful. It was also hard because they weren't students we saw a lot, so it was feeling like I didn't know them super well," Weissman said.

Despite initial difficulties in coordinating an Advisory schedule, the LHS administration still believes in the importance of having a space like Advisory for students. Aside from facilitating strong relationships within the LHS community, it provides a place where students and teachers could discuss school issues or current events. The alternative is having unstructured conversations during select blocks during the school day.

"How do we have something where we have a forum to be able to talk about [important events]?... What we are left to is 'Please talk about it in your first couple of periods folks and address that. Here is some structure that you can utilize that is all over the place,'" Stephens said.

However, due to the rigidity in the schedule last year, this aspect of the Advisory has not been fully implemented.

Considering the limitations of Advisory and the challenges in its execution, many students and faculty have supported the temporary pause.

"I think it's a good idea to pause it right now, as we try to decide as a staff what is the best way to move forward," Weissman said.

In the future, Stephens said he hopes to create an Advisory that offers a more equitable experience for participants with different personal backgrounds and varying comfort levels. However, there is still no definitive solution to meet the requests of all students and teachers.

"It remains to be seen because if we can do it, I want to do it. If we can't, then we're really not looking to be able to do Advisory between now and the end of the year," Stephens said.

Waddle You Do This Winter?

Featured Artist, Illustration by Jay Schaffer

Wind Ensemble Prepares for Carnegie Hall Performance

Staff photo by Angie Xu
Jared Cassedy conducts Wind Ensemble at the winter concert

Seiya Saneyoshi
Jahnavi Bolleddula
Staff Writers

Lexington High School's Wind Ensemble is currently preparing for its performance at Carnegie Hall in New York City on Feb. 27, 2022. The Wind Ensemble was selected to perform at Carnegie Hall's New York Wind Band Festival, an annual festival that showcases select ensembles from around the world.

They will be playing Overture to Candide, City Trees, Havana, and Bolero Concertante.

"What I love about this experience is a little bit different than the other Carnegie Hall experience that we would have had. It focuses directly on a very limited amount of ensembles that come to the festival from around the world," Jared Cassedy, Wind Ensemble conductor and Performing Arts Coordinator for Lexington Public Schools, said.

In addition to performing at Carnegie Hall, the Wind Ensemble will attend workshops led by experienced performers and conductors. They will also conduct an exchange with another local high school.

"It's not just we go to perform at Carnegie Hall and be done. We have a number of workshops with clinicians with some of the adjudicators that will work with us directly," Cassedy said.

Cassedy applied for the Wind Ensemble to be a part of the festival in January 2021. The festival had been canceled for the previous two years due to COVID-19.

"We found out on the last day of school last year [that we were chosen] and since then, we've been preparing for the music," Cassedy said.

For this performance, Cassedy hopes to focus on the Wind Ensemble's collaboration and camaraderie since the ensemble's primary purpose is to honor each individual within the larger group.

"We're so committed to working on music that brings us together that really helps us to celebrate our identity, our diversity. And I think that this trip in itself will enable us to become more invested in each other not just musically, but as human beings," Cassedy said.

For students in the Wind Ensemble, this performance comes as an exciting opportunity for them to celebrate the effort they have put in throughout the school year.

"Combined with my practicing hours plus my rehearsing at school, it's quite a bit," Ellie Kim, a freshman clarinet player in Wind Ensemble, said.

With the prestige of performing at a venue like Carnegie Hall, many Wind Ensemble students cited both the pressure and excitement that comes with it.

"I'm kind of nervous on some songs, there's a lot of hard pieces out there," Gavin Ohler, a junior in Wind Ensemble, said.

Ohler noted that many of the recordings used in the Wind Ensemble's application are from years past, adding another dimension of pressure for the performers.

"We have to stand up to the name, and we have to stand up to those recordings, so it is a lot of pressure," Ohler said.

Tubist Justin Sjodin Selected for All-Nationals Conference

Staff photo by Olivia Hoover
All-Nationals tubist Justin Sjodin

Sapphire Wang
Gaeun Suh
Staff Writers

Justin Sjodin, a Wind Ensemble tubist and Lexington High School senior, was accepted into the All-National Honor Ensembles Concert Band in early October.

Making an All-National Honor Ensemble is one of the highest recognitions a high school musician can receive. Applicants undergo an audition process after entering the Massachusetts Music Educators Association (MMEA) District and All-State ensembles.

Sjodin submitted his virtual audition over the summer and received his acceptance after a school ensemble rehearsal.

"It was really nice for that period of time, but I already knew that the thing was going to be virtual," Sjodin said.

In 5th grade, Sjodin began playing the euphonium, a brass wind instrument similar to the tuba. In 6th grade, he switched to the tuba, drawn to its loud, deep sounds.

"When you're that little, all you really care about is playing loud. But, as I got more used to playing the instrument, I learned how it fits inside the ensemble," Sjodin said. "As the tuba [player], I'm kind of the foundation of the whole house. Every instrument is important, but it felt like I had a place in a larger group."

From then on, Sjodin took weekly private lessons with Jobey Wilson, who helped him hone his skills as a player, improve his sound quality, and rehearse music.

"Jobey Wilson is the nicest guy. He's a complete miracle worker, and while I think that I could've done pretty well on my own, I do credit a lot of my performance towards him," Sjodin said.

In addition, Sjodin engages with music outside of private lessons by playing with various ensembles. He currently plays with New England Conservatory's Senior Massachusetts Youth Wind Ensemble and has played with the Rivers School Conservatory and a couple of smaller ensembles with Wilson in the past. At school, he plays in the Wind Ensemble and one of LHS's jazz ensembles. In addition to playing the tuba, he is also proficient in playing the trombone and trumpet.

Sjodin cites auditions for districts, states, and nationals as significant opportunities for musical growth.

"Feedback [that you receive through auditions] is wonderful, and who knows, you might make it into nationals as well. Hopefully, that time, we'll actually be traveling somewhere and getting to meet all those other wonderful musicians in person," Sjodin said.

Family Holiday Fundraiser Concert Returns

Vedanti Bhargava
Staff Writer

On Dec. 10, the Lexington High School Wind Ensemble and Chamber Orchestra performed together at the annual Family Holiday Fundraiser Concert.

Started by the late orchestra director Janet Haas, the concert has become an annual tradition in the music department before the December holiday break. This year's performing ensemble is larger than usual.

"This is the first time we're incorporating every single member of the Wind Ensemble, along with the Chamber Orchestra, all together. That gives us quite a robust ensemble," Rachel Jayson, an LHS orchestra director and the lead organizer of the concert, said.

The concert saw changes in 2020 due to the pause on live performances, so for many of the performers, the Holiday Concert was a new experience.

"Normally, at least one class of Chamber Orchestra or half of Chamber Orchestra would have experienced this concert already...We haven't had that experience, so we're all trying our hardest to pull it together," Caitlin'Lian, a senior and cellist in the Chamber Orchestra, said.

The concert's repertoire reflected the holiday season with ensembles performing a variety of holiday-themed songs.

"We'll do a mix of pop-based Christmas songs as well as slightly more traditional songs. We'll be performing a few movements from the Nutcracker Suite...and other holiday favorites, things like White Christmas...standard favorites such as Sleigh Ride. We also included some movie music from the Polar Express," Jayson said.

There were some concerns over if each ensemble would have enough time to learn their repertoire. Nonetheless, the students and ensemble directors worked diligently to ensure an enjoyable performance.

"We had our first big rehearsal today–a week out from the concert, and there was just so much joy in the room and so much music-making happening," Jayson said.

Given the interactive nature of the concert, there was a lot of anticipation among students preparing for the concert.

"I'm most excited about all the families that are showing up, especially since we haven't gotten to do this concert in a couple years and it's really for the kids because they get to dance around. For one of the pieces we actually ask the kids to dance in the aisles and stuff, so it's just a really fun environment that I've been looking forward to," Lian said.

Jayson also highlighted efforts to make the Holiday Concert more accessible to families.

"The idea is that we want people to come in and engage. The concert happens at 4:00 in the afternoon with the hopes that that is a more inclusive time for families... The program for the holiday concert is formatted like a coloring book...There's a Rudolph sing along that happens. We have a non-musician come up, usually, a special guest come up and conduct one of the pieces. So, it's really a time to remember that it's exciting to make music together," Jayson said.

The live concert scene at LHS will be more active as COVID-19 restrictions are lifted. The Family Holiday Concert aims to encourage a return to live performances.

"I think over COVID, one of the most painful things was not being able to make art together. So the ability to make art for the community and for young people and for people who maybe typically don't think a high school concert is the place to go, we really wanted to make this a space for them," Jayson said.

COVID-19 Performance Restrictions Eased for Fall Jam

Nora Kapoor
Lauren Wu
Staff Writers

This fall, Lexington High School's choral program lifted the mask mandate for performers and increased the limit for audience members during shows. Performers were allowed to sing without masks as long as they were three feet apart, and audience members could sit next to one another given they were masked.

This regulation came into effect right before the Fall Jam, an a capella event on Dec. 4 that involved all eight of LHS's active a capella groups.

"Performers don't have to wear a mask, but if they want to be close together, like a tight formation, they have to wear masks," Medha Jayendran, a freshman in the a cappella group Onomatopoeia, said.

Jayendran emphasized the importance of being able to sing without a mask.

"I feel like when you're singing without the mask, a lot of things sound-wise will be more clear. And since we're all more spaced out, that's a different sound than if everyone's close together," Jayendran said.

Some performers are uncertain about the unmasking policy.

"I think unmasking is something that can help with the timbre of our voice and the energy we bring, but at the same time, we have been doing rehearsals this entire time with masks, and we have engineered a sound that is decent in masks," Zoe Zachary, a junior and member of a cappella group Noteworthy, said.

With Jam serving as a hallmark of the a cappella program, many students look forward to its return, especially in a relatively normal fashion given the updated COVID-19 restrictions.

"Jam is probably one of our biggest opportunities to showcase what we've been doing this whole time," Zachary said. "It's a bit more casual than chorus concerts... We can joke around, we can do funny things, we can really make it what we want it to be, and that's an opportunity that you don't really find in a lot of places,"

Staff photo by Olivia Hoover
Guacamole, one of LHS' A Cappella groups, performs at Jam

John DiPerna, technical director at LHS, cited the importance of being in-person given the live nature of a cappella performances.

"The energy inside the theater is electric," DiPerna said. "Students supporting and encouraging their peers. Everything is free-flowing. I sang in a cappella groups in high school and college, so it makes me reminisce about my experiences, and I am elated to work in a community where the arts are alive and well and passed down generation after generation."

The 2021 Fall Jam was not only the first Jam of the school year, but it also marked the first in-person Jam in approximately two years. For newer performers, this was their first in-person Jam and for veteran performers, this year's Fall Jam was a return to live performing.

"It's really upsetting to think about how many in-person Jams we've missed, because [there are] three Jams per year, [and] this should, in theory, be my seventh in-person Jam, and it is my second," Zachary said. "But it makes me all the more grateful that we can go back and be in person. There's absolutely nothing like being able to sing live with an audience."

More content at lhsmusket.com

Problems @ LHS: The Club Conundrum

Darren Tran
Columnist

At the beginning of every academic year, Dean Nicole Caniff receives hundreds of forms from students registering new clubs. About a month later, the Lexington High School Quad is teeming with colorful posters and zealous students, all trying to bring fresh faces into their clubs. Each club promises a unique experience, which prompts you to sign up before leaving with a lollipop and the expectation of receiving an email later on.

At a glance, the plethora of student organizations may appear to be a testament to the ingenuity and independent spirit at LHS, but there is more than meets the eye. Those who stood out there on Activities Fair Day had to fight their way to the top, whether by winning an intra-club election or getting on their predecessors' good sides: the journey to the top of the organizational hierarchy was not a walk in the park.

When people join a club as freshmen, it is often to indulge in similar interests with like-minded peers or explore fun hobbies like spikeball and ping pong. But for many students, there is an additional reason, and it is a much more important one: they are joining with the intent of becoming a leader in a later year. It is irrelevant whether this is for college (we will discuss this in a bit) or simply because they crave authority over others.

When the primary motivation for joining a club is to eventually become a leader, you begin to view everyone around you as competition instead of 'like-minded peers with similar interests.' As a result, everything you do feels like a step towards or back from the ultimate goal of grabbing a title by the time you are a junior or a senior. This turns clubs you initially joined to explore your interests into stressful obligations. Given the already competitive nature of LHS, it is a shame to bring that sentiment into clubs, which serve as a space for students to relax and do what they are passionate about.

Now, the topic of leadership for the purpose of college. Yes, let us all admit it: many of us do what we do can to improve our chances of getting accepted to the college of our dreams. However, when that becomes the most important thing on your mind, it most definitely hinders your ability to be a club leader. Here, I will also mention a particular "demographic": those that create clubs just to get into college.

The biggest issue is that this does not allow for club sustainability. For many of these club leaders and founders, their obligations to their club end the moment they do not have to worry about college anymore. By mid-January, nearly all seniors have submitted their last college applications and the departure of their application correlates with their own departure. There is a noticeable decline in the quality of many clubs, and some even shut down. I have been a member of several clubs that completely disappeared in the second semester when club leaders ghosted us (the club consisted of just me, a freshman at the time, and five other seniors; that itself should have been a red flag but the blame is not on me, at least this time around).

This is particularly bad because it displays the leader's lack of empathy for the other club members who they promised to lead. Consequently, many younger students have a subpar club experience and develop negative attitudes towards clubs in general.

Now, how do we fix this? Admittedly, shifting this mentality is a challenge. We can't do much to change these club leaders' intentions, except hope that someday they can realize that you can work towards college without sacrificing fun, both for yourself and others.

Now, if you are adamant about doing everything for college, here is a suggestion to mitigate your consequences. As you enter your senior year, give leadership positions or at least leadership responsibilities to students in grades below you. This ensures that the "next-in-line" already have some experience underneath their belt and the transition of leadership is smooth. Even if we cannot change the mindset of the people at the top, we can at least make an effort to keep the club alive for students who might be the change we wish to see.

Gondry's Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind: Breathtaking

Pavan Cheruku
Columnist

Your heart feels like it's being hijacked by a drummer in an amateur rock band. You're certain everyone can hear its thunderous beat, which reverberates in your ears with the same intensity as striking a piñata in an empty stairway. You're simultaneously improvising a presentation for World Geography class you put together just 30 minutes ago since you spent the last few nights binge-watching live performances of The Strokes (your favorite band). Your saving grace is the one flashcard you were allowed to use during the presentation, which you've crammed so intensely with notes that it looks like an interpretive post-modernist painting. As you begin explaining the characteristics of Temperate Forests, the flashcard feels like ice against the nervous heat of your body. It drops. You drop. Everyone in class is pointing and laughing—even the teacher. And there's nothing you could wish for more than to forget it all happened.

Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind, a strong contender for my favorite movie of all time, explores our desire to forget difficult or painful memories. Directed by Michel Gondry, this 2004 masterpiece blends the genres of science fiction, psychological thriller, comedy, and romance. The screenplay was provided by the legendary Charlie Kaufman, who penned other deeply imaginative films like Being John Malkovich and Adaptation.

Gondry's masterpiece revolves around the broken relationship between Joel Barrish (Jim Carrey) and Clementine Kruczynski (Kate Winslet). After a particularly riling fight between the couple, Clementine impulsively decides to undergo a procedure to forget about Joel and their relationship. Joel is blindsided by her decision and decides to forget Clementine as well. Midway through the procedure, however, Joel soon realizes he doesn't want to forget her. Much of the rest of the story takes place in his mind, as Joel revisits key memories from their relationship, desperately trying not to forget Clementine. Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind features twists and turns, uses nonlinear storytelling, and is an unbelievably entertaining emotional roller coaster. You're almost guaranteed to laugh or cry at least once during its 108 minute runtime.

The acting and character development in Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind are excellent, making the film incredibly rewatchable. Joel and Clementine are relatable characters, and their chemistry is wholesome. My favorite Jim Carrey performance is his role as Joel. Carrey conveys his character's social awkwardness and cynicalism exceedingly well, which makes learning about Joel's failed relationship and insecurities compelling. Furthermore, Kate Winslet gives one of her best performances as Clementine. She imbues her character with enough personality to power a Jumbo Passenger Jet. Winslet's portrayal of Clementine also counters the manic pixie dream girl archetype that paints female characters in movies as static characters with no character development of their own, solely existing to save a male protagonist from himself.

The cinematography and thematic narratives woven throughout Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind also deserve praise. Shot design helps the audience understand how Joel feels at different points of his relationship with Clementine. During a particularly vulnerable scene, techniques such as a shaky handheld camera, an eye-level angle, suffocating lighting, and the sound of his hyperventilation were used to help a viewer see from his perspective.

The thematic narrative I drew from this film is that all memories, good and bad, are a part of who we are. The most devastating experiences tend to teach us the most, so we should be hesitant to conclude that ignorance is bliss. In the case of a difficult break-up, using a procedure like the one depicted in this movie would keep people from being able to truly move on.

I will never be able to give enough praise to Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind. The film is a breathtaking feat of storytelling, cinematography, and acting. It is a masterpiece. I will give Michel Gondry's Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind an A+.

A Pandemic of Its Own: Screen Time Addiction

Austin Li
Columnist

At the beginning of this year, I accidentally left my phone in the car when my parents dropped me off at school. I didn't think too much of it—apart from rummaging through my empty pockets a couple of times, my day went on as normal. But then I received an email from my mom titled "your phone is in New York": my parents had left to visit family in New York for four days, taking my phone with them.

My immediate thought was to locate my iPad from 7th grade. Instead, I challenged myself: I could try to just go without a phone. How hard could it be?

I ended up having a lot more awkward conversations that day: the color of a pencil case, the size of the school hallways, and the school lunch. Although difficult, I noticed a refreshing change from the repetitive phrases people typed during a text conversation. As a more authentic form of communication, my in-person talks were far more engaging than stale online interactions.

Snapchat, Instagram, and Messages are ubiquitous in the digital age. Initially a tool to facilitate connections between friends and family, social media has developed into an entirely new living environment. Facebook recently rebranded with the name "Meta", symbolic of the metaverse. This completely virtual world opens a new realm of reality where users can shop, play games, and spend cryptocurrency, causing them to avoid venturing into the 'real world'.

Within our schools, social media is a destructive force in students' daily lives. At the core of online toxicity, procrastination and privacy is a change in the way we process information. Students who are obsessed with their phones become ingrained within a digital environment. As technology becomes more intelligent, the line between our decisions and the decisions technology makes for us becomes blurry. At some point, we could be giving up our human autonomy to computer algorithms.

So what does all of this have to do with a Lexington High School experiment? Students, consumed by their phones, often play into the story of losing control. Thus, I propose a contest: to watch how long students can go without their phones during school. The winners are those who can stay away from their phones the longest.

This contest would dramatically change the school environment. Most students wouldn't know what to do with themselves. Apart from the practical problems of needing to call your parents in the middle of the day, this challenge poses another difficult task for LHS students: what will you spend your time doing without your phone? You might have to start that conversation with the half-friend you've been sitting with for math for half the year now. Most students are going to fail within a day. The brave ones will go for around a week. The ones without phones will be having the best times of their lives.

So, how long can you go without your phone?

Sports

Varsity Boys Soccer Team Plays in the State Semifinals

Elias Tamer
Ishaan Tipirneni
Staff Writers

This year, the Lexington High School Boys' Varsity Soccer team played in the state semifinals for the fourth time in the team's history.

The team won its first playoff game against Milford, 2-1, and their second playoff game against Marshfield, 2-1. Then, the team went on to win the state quarter-finals against Leominster in a penalty shootout. While the team did lose 1-0 in the semifinals against Brookline, they experienced multiple victories throughout the season.

Cruz Ortiz DeRosa, a junior captain, credits the team's success to their close team bonding.

"It's probably one of the best atmospheres I've been on as a team my whole life. Everyone is friends, everyone is cool with each other. I mean we used to spend time at team dinners until 12:30, 1 A.M. just talking to each other," Ortiz DeRosa said.

Additionally, Dastan Pakyari, the LHS Boys Soccer Coach, indicated that the captains served as role models for the team.

"They've taken a lot of responsibility. The role of the captain is up to the person in that role and how much they want to do with it. I think the captains this year took it above and beyond, and I think they took it on themselves to be responsible, not just with the team, but for anyone in the program," Pakyari said.

Liam Keis, a sophomore at LHS and the team's center-midfielder, also emphasized the captains' role in boosting morale.

"After any loss they were never putting each other down, everyone was trying to pick each other back up and to build back, especially during the regular season," Keis said.

In addition, the players acknowledged the importance of the fan turnout at the games.

"I thought there were a lot of fans, especially at Leominster. It was their home field, but I thought we had more fans. It was in the freezing cold and wind. I thought it was very impressive," Keis said.

Pakyari echoed this sentiment.

"It was phenomenal. We have always had pretty good support from these fans especially come playoff time when we need it. I mean you can see how many kids poured on the field after the overtime win against Milford and the PK [penalty kick] shootout at Leominster," Pakyari said.

As an LHS soccer team alumni, Paykari reflected on the experience.

"It's more than just having success. I think the friendships and the memories that you make through that process you hold on for a lifetime, those never go away...I think I attribute a lot of who I am today as a person to the experiences I had back playing soccer at the high school," Pakyari said.

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